New Bedford Harbor (MA) Superfund Site

Q: What is the status of the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site clean up?

A: New Bedford Harbor is one of the national mega Superfund sites, containing approximately 880,000 cubic yards of highly PCB-contaminated sediment covering roughly 260 acres requiring removal and disposal. Most of the PCBs were released from the now-vacant Aerovox capacitor plant in New Bedford. Due to the health risks from consuming PCB-contaminated local seafood, Massachusetts has restricted fishing and lobstering within the 18,000 acre site since 1979.

Progress to Date

- Approximately 146,000 cy of the most highly contaminated sediments and shoreline soils have been remediated to date.
- $25 million intermodal (rail, truck, or barge) shoreline dewatering facility constructed.
- Full scale dredging, dewatering and disposal operations began in 2004; current $15m/yr funding allows only about 40 days of dredging each year along with other site needs.
- Innovative "Fish Smart" campaign was implemented to reach high risk populations.
- Pilot underwater cap in 2005, in collaboration with navigational dredging, saved over $15 million and accelerated the cleanup of sediments near the Cornell-Dubilier mill.

Human Health Risks

- Seafood consumption risk is 40 times higher than Superfund action levels (higher under worst case scenarios); many local seafood consumers/significant Env. Justice concerns.
- Dermal contact risk from PCB-contaminated shoreline soils is 4 times higher than Superfund action levels (higher under worst case scenarios).

Ecological Risks

- In-stream PCB levels up to 30 times higher than Ambient Water Quality Criteria.
- Sediment PCB levels up to 10,000 times higher than ecologically safe levels.

Existing Cleanup Plan

- Dredging, dewatering and disposal (either offsite or in shoreline disposal facilities) of the 880,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment (see current issues below).

Current Issues

- The time and cost to complete the remedy increases exponentially with the current limited funding (5 years and $337 million at $80m/yr versus 38 years and $1.1 billion at the current $15m/yr). The proposed stimulus funding would mitigate this issue at least for this year.

- Negotiations are actively underway with the one PRP (AVX Corp.) that has a cost-reopener in its 1992 Consent Decree, but any settlement is likely to be more than one year away.
- ESD planned for winter 2009/2010 for a lower harbor CAD (contained aquatic disposal) cell. Would reduce both the cost and time to complete the remedy significantly.
- Proposed stimulus funding would have positive multiplier effects:
  - would allow greater volumes of dredging in the highly contaminated upper harbor;
  - allows the potential to use the clean "bottom of CAD" material for "capping after dredging" in those areas already dredged in the upper harbor - thus greatly improving the overall protectiveness of the remedy;
  - would facilitate local plans to develop shoreline public access, recreational boating, competitive rowing, and wetland restoration.